

INTERVIEWEE: ED PEARL

INTERVIEWER: Victor Cohen

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EP: Bernie, my brother, who lives in Long Beach, near –

VC: Near my mom?

EP: Yeah. It's a different perspective. Barbara is more political and Bernie is hostile to politics, and thought maybe I was serious. More than that, he wouldn't come in the Ash Grove for years.

VC: Really!

EP: Yeah. After I got really political, like in '68, and things like that. But during the important – aside from the political period – during both the first period and becoming traditional and then the amplification part of the Ash Grove, he was an absolutely critical part of all of that. He and David Cohen ran the Ash Grove School of Traditional Music.

VC: Your brother Bernie?

EP: Yeah. And he accompanied, uniquely, Mance, Lightning, many others. He played with Freddie King. Actually went on the road with Freddie.

VC: With Freddie King.

EP: Yeah.

VC: The blues guitar player?

EP: Yeah, second guitar. Right now, in terms of the people that I've seen out here, he's the best traditional blues player that there is, right here in Los Angeles, of playing the old stuff. And creates within the genres. Most of the music is very close. I gave him the

job of sort of helping people as they came, and he did that. I became very close with him. Our father had died shortly before the Ash Grove opened and he was younger than me, and he really related to those older men a lot. And he loved the blues. Just emotionally, he really took to it.

VC: So he helped run the Ash Grove music school?

EP: Well, no, he and David Cohen ran the Ash Grove music school. I didn't have anything – well, I mean, I welcomed it. It was their idea and they ran it. They also were my – as much as the Ramblers played a critical role in bringing the older traditional white performers, Bernie and David were my knowledgeable guys, certainly to the amplified music that we started hiring a lot. I didn't know much about it. I sort of had shunned it.

When I opened the Ash Grove, we played strictly acoustic. I guess I was really affected by, first of all, the fact that everyone that came to the Ash Grove in that first period played acoustic music. It was sort of their own way of having roots, or something of that sort, by playing the way people would play on their back porches, and so on, in the South, as opposed to the more slicker, gussied up, amplified music in professional juke joints. So it was home music rather than commercial music, you might say.

When we changed, starting in '65, first of all, the first amplified band that we had was King David and the Parables, which was David and Bernie and Barry Hansen, Dr.

Demento. Barry also lives in Lakewood, so if you want to talk about the Ash Grove and the blues that went on there, and the country music that went on there, Barry and Bernie are right out there close to your mother. You could hit both of them in one day.

VC: That would be great.

EP: Yeah. I'll give you their phone numbers and everything.

VC: Sure. I wanted to talk to you a little bit about just growing up in Boyle Heights, because I don't know anything about that part of L.A., that time. I'm kind of fascinated by what you were saying. The last time we talked you talked about organizing your middle school when – what was that guy?

EP: Gerald L.K. Smith.

VC: Who was he?

EP: He was a racist, reactionary, vicious, anti-Semite, anti-black, anti-communist, anti-everything. A race baiter. I mean, he was a genuine – had Hitler come over here, he would have had him to dinner, let's put it that way, immediately. And a very power voice for that part. You've heard again and again how Roosevelt had to do all of his work and let Eleanor be the one to talk about race relations and the rest of it, because he had to work with all these right-wing racist motherfuckers in the cells, and a lot of them in the Midwest, too, and the North, and even Michigan. Michigan actually had a huge Ku Klux Klan, and Indiana, and so on. Pennsylvania. Probably other states, too, and also in California.

Personally, I never saw the white racist thing, but that's because I didn't travel out there. I mean, I did a little bit. One of our cousins had a farm in Arcadia and that would be a place where you'd find that kind of thing. Definitely Canyon Country. Saugus, Newhall, and all that.

VC: And it's still that way.

EP: Yeah. And when I played out there in the square dance band – I was a square dance player and we didn't – I mean, when I played out there with the truckers and whatnot, out at Edwards Air Force Base, I mean, we were a band, so I was a white hillbilly kid and I

was accepted completely. I mean, the people I played with, honestly, I cannot recall a single racial anything. But in any event, we did play in the same places where a lot of right-wingers and sort of – the last I was out there we saw a Confederate flag, it was like four years ago. I'm not kidding.

We went with our friend Joe, who is now deceased, to a – we wanted something, and there were like two or three huge auctions going on out there. My friend Joe, he knew what was on every road and every – he had a mind that just was like a map. So he knew all of the best camping places, the exact routes, and he knew where all the auction yards were and all that. So he and I went up there to Canyon Country and I showed him where I had gone to Habonim camp.

VC: That was the Labor Zionist camp?

EP: Yeah, the Labor Zionist camp up in Green Valley. (laughs) And it was on that road, right on Sparky Canyon Road where we saw the Confederate flag, or something like that. We stopped in one place, and Joe looked very Jewish, so I could tell the guy was just ready to kill us or something.

VC: How'd your family end up in Boyle Heights?

EP: Well, it was – her older sister, who raised her – she was the youngest.

VC: Your mom?

EP: My mother. And her sister was almost old enough to be her mother. Their parents died when she was fairly young and she was raised by my aunt, along with my aunt's daughters. And she's just slightly older than my aunt's daughters. So she and her cousins were like three sisters. And she had two brothers, one of them between her and our aunt, and then my Uncle Phil was the oldest one.

VC: And they came to L.A. –

EP: I have no idea, but I think – I really don't know why, but they came. My aunt, and the family seat, was on Soto near what is now Cesar Chavez, sort of a Jewish district. They, prior to that, were living on Central Avenue, which was I guess Jewish at some point. So my dad and her moved to – well, where I lived, where I was born.

VC: How did they meet? Your parents.

EP: I think it was at some Jewish social thing. She knew Max Factor. Seriously. Or at least he used to come to their – whatever organization, or whatever the thing was. _____ celebrity.

VC: I'll bet.

EP: Yeah.

VC: Right. So then they had you and Bernie –

EP: No, no, no. They had one child that was stillborn, and then they had Bernice, my sister, then Stan, then me, then Sherman, then Bernie. She had six births but five of them still survive.

VC: And you liked growing up in Boyle Heights?

EP: You mean was I a happy child?

VC: Yeah.

EP: Yeah, I think so. I mean, a lot of – I guess so. I mean, I had a normal childhood. I played a lot of sports. There was a playground near there. All of us did. We played football in the streets and rode bikes and I played softball and I played – I think Triple A, I'm not sure, but I played really high level softball after high school, just to keep up. And I played football in high school. Sherman played football in high school. Bernie started

playing football at Dorsey, because we had moved. We got evicted so we moved to West Adams, so Bernie went to Dorsey.

VC: And that was when you were above the hairdresser?

EP: Yeah. So he got his tooth knocked out and that was the end of my – he stopped playing. He went into I think cross country or something like that. We all played sports. All of us.

VC: And you were always living in mixed neighborhoods.

EP: Yeah, yeah. I had friends in – I mean, the first club I belonged to was called the Saxons, which was Jews, Mexicans, Russians, and general Goyim. I don't know. But it was ridiculous. Most of us were either Jews, Mexicans, or something. And to be called the Saxons, I don't know how that started. I was in Saxons four and five. Because I was right in the middle between four and five, so they couldn't figure out where to put me.

VC: And there was never any tension between the white kids and the Mexican kids, or the Jews and the white kids?

EP: Not in my lifetime. There probably was at some point. But the thing that was startling was the animosity of the Chicanos towards the blacks. But I recall, when the Saxons got into a fight, actually we fought Venice High School. Went all the way out to the beach and had a big –

VC: Really!

EP: Yeah. But I don't think I ever fought a black kid, ever. I fought a lot of Mexican kids, because they were in another gang or something. I had a bad period when I got into junior high school. In grammar school I was an all A student, and I skipped I think three grades. Two or three. At least two. And they wanted to skip me, and I remember my

mother taking me to school and being informed that they wouldn't skip me because it would be bad for me socially, and my mother was very upset and she cried over it. I don't know. So I was sort of supposed to be a lawyer or something. That was the plan.

But anyway, when I got to junior high school, I guess it was – I don't know how – oh, well, for one thing, I met these other guys so then I went to another group of people, the Condors. So the toughest small person, because I was small, was assigned to have a fight with me, from the Saxons. So we fought. He wound up being a very famous jockey at the time, Billy Harmatz, Bill Harmatz. Everyone who remembers him says, "God, he was strong." I say, "Yes, I know." (both laugh) But so was I. Anyway, we never – it was a draw. I fought so many draws with people. I don't know. We didn't know how to fight. I mean, we fought seriously, but, you know, you took your lumps and gave them.

VC: That was just a part of being a kid.

EP: Yeah. So the first couple of years of junior high school I got expelled for that, for fighting, I got expelled for the political thing. I set a record. And lectures. Eddie Pearl, how can you do this? (laughs) You're shaming your parents. There was one Jewish gym teacher, Mr. Bishop, so he was the one that gave me the lectures, because he was Jewish, so he could properly shame me into changing my ways. (laughs) Ultimately, it was more interesting to talk to girls at that point. It was probably sublimation, you know?

VC: Right. But at the same time, too, politics was kind of –

EP: Well, like I said, at that young age I ran into the – my older brother, Stan, had joined Habonim. So he took me to a meeting, and that just changed my life right there.

VC: And that was the meeting where the guy said there was an inverse pyramid?

EP: Yeah, the pyramid, and so on. And things just started to make sense, and gave a vision of a society where that was happening.

VC: Did your parents – were they a part of it? Or other siblings?

EP: No. The thing that contemporary Jewish people don't know, and older people won't concede, is that people were not Zionists at all. Everyone was against my going to Israel. Everyone. Then, of course, they became huge Zionists just when I changed in '67, with the Israeli taking over the occupied territories.

And also, the other thing that was striking – both things were striking – is that the Holocaust was not a major anything in my life. I had to learn about it from books. It was not a major anything in anybody's life. I mean, I would have heard about it. There was no outcry in the Jewish community. There just wasn't. I'm sure there were people, but it just was not part of our lives at all. Nor were the Rosenbergs. I mean, I was all into Zionist this and that, and against McCarthy, and so on, and going my own socialist way. Again, it was something I learned about from the papers but it was not – it didn't cut emotionally to me. I guess the Communist Party was so severely repressed that they couldn't really do outreach, or they didn't really affect the community. So what you see, or what people say, in my experience at least, didn't really happen to the community.

VC: Yeah. That's when the CP – everyone was told to go underground.

EP: No, no, no. But I mean, even the people, let's say progressive people that weren't – I mean, yeah, the Communist Party – not necessarily members, but Communist Party leaders went underground. But still, they were the ones that would have – that's one of the problems with the Communist Party. It was so controlled and so, in a way, top heavy that the membership really didn't develop, which I found out later on when I talked to

communists and they just did not have a real analysis. When I was debating with my friends, starting UCLA, really analyzing socialism, and so on, I had really high falutin' intellectual discussions. And you if tried that with a communist, they'd say, "Here, have a piece of cake. Now, let's go out and sell the —" (both laugh) I'm making that up, of course.

So anyway, that was — like I was forbidden — I told you. I was not supposed to go to the girl I really liked, go to the — they had a meeting house down the block.

VC: No, you didn't say that.

EP: Yeah. Stella Kalish. The houses had really big lawns, even though we were really poor. But the people on the other side of the street, people down the block, they had a lot of territory. There was Betsy the goat girl that actually she had goats in her yard. She was a little demented, backward, but fenced in so the goats couldn't run away. She took care of the goats, and then milked them and — I swear. And next door was the Kalishes, and they had their house set back, and then they had a separate house that was a meeting house, and from what I understand, it was a meeting house of communists, which I didn't know until my mother told me I shouldn't go there.

VC: And that was when you were in middle school?

EP: That was when I was a kid in grammar school.

VC: Interesting.

EP: Yeah.

VC: So when you started hanging out with the Labor Zionist group, what about that resonated? Why did that pull you in?

EP: Well, I told you. It just was – for one thing, I mean, I was bar mitzvahed, but I didn't particularly – it was just something I was supposed to do. Because my father wasn't religious at all. My mother followed her sister, who was devout and had a very stern sense of right and wrong and all that. My mother just wanted to please – to fit in. That was her goal in life was to fit in. So she fit in with her sister, and after her sister died then she wanted to fit in to be a bourgeois. I mean, she never made it. I mean, she was also a working person. After my dad died, she went back to work and worked for like twenty years. In civil service somewhere downtown, secretary or something. Because she had done that when she was young.

VC: You said last time that a lot of what let you kind of not be a part of that fifties culture was the Labor Zionist group, right?

EP: Totally. I rapidly, very rapidly – that became my social life and my intellectual life, and there were some very smart people there, very intelligent people. I was up visiting my daughter, and they get the *San Francisco Chronicle*. On the magazine there's a picture and it says "Dr. Mardi Horowitz," who was one of my very close friends, very close friends. He's a psychiatrist and he had to do – I can't remember what it was, but I still have the magazine. But he'd given a lecture and was asked some – and me and Mardi and Mark _____ – Mark was literally a genius, absolutely a genius, but he was very taken with Catholicism, so he tried to get me and Mardi – I mean, we went to masses with him. He wanted us to go with him. It was just amazingly powerful and spiritual. I really – Christmas Mass and things like that. There was no such equivalent. It was just so grand and so – really touching. I mean, it touched me very deeply.

One time we went to Mexico, the three of us, and we camped and we just

debated four days in a row. Then Mark went to Harvard. Mardi and I – M-a-r-d-i, so it's Hungarian, of Hungarian origin. Mardi and I went to UCLA, but Mark went to Harvard. And then I think he must have been in the CIA because – for two reasons. I got a call from Washington saying that Mark had either applied for a position or was going on a particular thing, and in doing a background check, he told about me, him, and Mardi spending a week camping in Ensenada. So they wanted my recollections of that. And even though I felt uncomfortable about who was asking, and so on, I didn't want to fuck him up, so I basically told the guy everything I could remember from that, which was completely innocent. I mean, we stayed on the beach, we argued with each other, talked about girls, and went to church. (laughs) That was all we did. I'm telling you, that's all we did for a week. It was great. We went other places and did the same thing when other people were doing whatever they were doing. We were the three.

And the other time was during the Vietnam war and I took my wife, Kate, to UCLA, and it was Robert Scherer debating Mark _____, and there was a couple of other people. But Mark rationalized the Vietnam War. And he saw me so I went over and we spoke. I was ashamed to introduce him to my wife. I mean, I'd gone over and we'd talked and all that. I spent about five minutes – and I could tell he was really hurt. I didn't know what to say to him. Because how do you deal with that? I had such diverse politics and we'd been apart for years, many years, and what do you say to somebody you really loved? Just a really close friend. And even to say, Mark, what have you been doing? And I haven't seen him since, or heard from him. But anyway, so yeah, it was stimulating intellectually and socially and everything, with girlfriends and –

VC: When you went to UCLA, what was your major?

EP: Philosophy and math. That's how I got the math part. And then me and Mardi took philosophy. But he had to be premed, but still we took philosophy together. It was great. Then we could argue with Abraham Kaplan, who was actually a great philosopher, who I thought I really – I engaged in like a thirty minute debate once with him. And he kept asking, but why, but why, but why. Finally, I came to exactly the conclusion that he started with. (both laugh) I said, "There is no why, it's how." He said, "Precisely." (both laugh) I'll never forget that. It was not a question of choice, it was a question of how these things affect one another.

VC: So that was when you started booking shows, right?

EP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I just happened to be studying in the library and I heard these kids at the next table talking about Pete Seeger, so I just said, "You know, I love Pete Seeger. Can I sit in?" They said, "Sure." So I did. That started it. And I told you about it.

VC: Right. And you had already seen Pete Seeger before, though, when you were –

EP: Yes, I had, at Idyllwild. I'd gone up there with – there was an older guy, I was friends with his brother, Herman _____, and he was _____. And he was going with somebody my age, Mae. They wound up getting married and everything. He was a pilot, and he also had a car, and he had a great voice. So he was the one who took us up to Idyllwild. So I went up to Idyllwild a couple of times. I really loved Pete. I was already playing the guitar and all of that, so I just got involved. But that was also through Habonim. _____ also was a brilliant guy. The Habonim was really – I guess it was a place for Jewish intellectuals and a way to talk about things without being repressed for ideas. So that's what I was lucky enough to slip into.

VC: Right. And I'm fascinated that there wasn't a booster for Israel at the same time.

EP: Well, there was.

VC: I mean, in the way it would be today.

EP: Yeah, there was some strong – I felt right from very young – first of all, I assumed that Arabs and Jews would be equal. And even in the early discussions, the particular faction I was part of, slipped into, you know, were talking about signs being both in Hebrew and Arabic and people being equal and blah, blah, blah. I knew nothing of the driving out of the Palestinian population and the razing of the villages and making Tel Aviv, or whatever. It just simply didn't exist. They kept it secret from us. There was an Israeli representative, and he never – I mean, none of the Israeli representatives who were there as our connection were really as intellectual as we were, so they just would present sort of a picture of it.

Like I said, Mardi is a psychiatrist, Mark went off to Harvard as an historian, and wherever else he went, and I went on to my thing. So it was different. When Bernie went in the very late fifties, he went as a confirmed Zionist. I don't know that he knew much more, but when he got there – and I remember my brother Sherman went there. He was not part of it, but for years he just talked about standing guard I think it was because there had been shots fired at Jewish farmers. So that was his basic argument until he married Meredith, a Chicago girl with a more conventional progressive background, basically began changing him. To my astonishment, actually, about six, seven, eight years ago, he simply flipped, began seeing what it really was.

VC: It's hard I think to get that picture today, even.

EP: Yeah.

VC: Even in spite of how atrocious Israel is.

EP: Yeah. Well, not to most of the world, but here, yeah.

VC: Yeah, right.

EP: Thanks for that.

VC: Right. You said that the Ash Grove, before it opened, that you had been booking shows around town?

EP: Yes, but that was in late '57, early '58. Between Pete Seeger in '54 and the Ash Grove in '58, or the booking of these – the actual organizing, producing of these shows – there was a lapse of four years or something. It didn't really occur to me. I mean, I played hillbilly music up in _____, and I played the hootenannies we had up at UCLA.

VC: And you were playing guitar?

EP: Yeah. And my sisters, they sang in Odetta's chorus. Guy Carawan, my teacher, and the one who – the Johnny Appleseed of the – and arranger of "We Shall Overcome." I guess maybe Pete shares producer credit. Or, not producer, but adapter credit with Guy. I'm not sure why, but I think so.

VC: I've heard it attributed to Pete Seeger.

EP: No, no. Pete would be the first person that would say, no, it was Guy Carawan. Guy specifically – Pete was not in the South and Guy lived in the South. He was the music teacher at Highlander. After Sofia Horton died in 1959, Guy was recruited. Guy had gone – there's a real famous trip that happened – let's back up to '54 – that Guy Carawan, Frank Hamilton, and Jack Elliot took to the South. It was the first time that – or, it's a famous time that northern white kids went down south to see all these people that they'd heard about or knew about.

Guy, of course, his parents were from North Carolina, but Jack Elliott is Elliott _____ from Brooklyn. Frank Hamilton was a musical genius. I still have never seen anybody who could do more things with – Frank learned how to master the banjo by riding a freight car from L.A. to San Francisco. And this was sworn to me by Guy. By the time they hit San Francisco, Frank was brilliant on the banjo. (laughs) And then he actually took Pete's place in the Weavers when Pete – but the thing about Frank is, the problem with Frank – he's on my list and he writes me things. He's very nice. He lives in Tampa, Florida, or someplace like that now. He lives in Florida. He could hear everything, including his entire classical music background. His mother was an absolute nut, and a musician. So he would put in things – he could do anything with his hands and with an instrument, but he heard everything and he tried to put everything into it. So he never really had an impact on people because they have their own – as people were developing musical taste and musical depth, it was within a particular framework, and he didn't have that kind of a background. So he would put in arpeggios or whatever, or chords and things that had nothing – when he was just playing his own music. I'm sure, in the Weavers he played what the Weavers play, and so on, in a loud voice, if not a great voice.

Pete Seeger doesn't have a great – he would say he doesn't have a great voice either. He really does. I mean, he was a great singer, a great communicator. Pete is the best. Even for Obama, "This Land is Your Land," Pete's up there leading everybody. Significantly shorter, though, as the years go by. He used to be like six-four, and now he's like five-eleven, or something like that. I've noticed that even in this – we interviewed him for the film about – this summer it'll be two years ago, at John Cohen's house, and he was

already – well, he already had stopped singing, basically. Except then we had a – he brought his banjo. I said, "Do you want to sing?" He said, "Well, what do you think I brought it for?" So we started doing that. And he led me, _____, Jerry, and one of his daughters in song. (laughs) Like we were the _____. (laughs) That's Pete. But he actually started singing during that, and it really sounded okay. So he still had that thing. But I looked at the YouTube thing and he was just giving out the – but he did sort of do some little harmony things.

VC: Right. Yeah, that was amazing seeing him there. Quite a moment.

EP: Yeah.

VC: So, Guy Carawan.

EP: Oh, they went south, and during that time they went to Highlander. They went to many other places. They visited different people, _____ Kazy, then Billy Faier, who's a banjo player in Miami. But they went to Mouteagle, Tennessee, and they spent some time with Miles Horton. So Miles called Guy and asked him to come on east and help out. So he did, about a year after the Ash Grove started, and he wound up staying there. He met Candy, who was an exchange student from Pomona College, I think, into the Fisk University in Nashville, and then she went to – she was one of the sit-ins. She was the white girl in the sit-ins. And she went to Highlander and she met Guy and they fell in love. He had been married here to somebody else. Then they split up.

VC: So he was *your* teacher?

EP: Yeah, he taught me guitar for awhile, a little while.

VC: And that was before the Ash Grove opened?

EP: Yeah. Mainly it was _____ Hawes, _____ teacher, for American folk music, but I

can't remember why. But I took a couple of lessons from Guy. I wound up giving him lessons, actually, as I learned other things.

VC: So then when did you start booking shows?

EP: Oh. So then I was courting Kate Hughes, who I met up at Idyllwild, actually.

VC: Was she a member of the Habonim?

EP: No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Her family heritage is – she's a Forbes, John Forbes company. Not the magazine Forbes. I think I told you. John Carey is part of the family. He stayed with us, actually. We were on the family island. It's the only privately owned group of islands off of Cape Cod, or off of anywhere, whatever. So the Forbes family – Forbes, Emerson, including Ralph Waldo – Forbes, Emerson, Hughes, Cunningham are some names.

But John Forbes was a Scots sea captain. I don't know if that means slaves, but I don't know that it does mean slaves. But in any event, he made a lot of money and he financed Alexander Graham Bell. Was one of the key financiers of Alexander Graham Bell. So the family fortune was made there. And they have a seat on the Stock Exchange and all that. They're Boston. I met, when I went there in '59 – I don't think it was Prescott Bush, but it was Leverett Saltenstahl, the senator. We actually went to Newport – I don't know how this was, but we went to Newport, the first Newport Folk Festival, Kate and I, on a yacht. They're all sailors. Her older brother John, whom I never met, actually went on his honeymoon by sailing with his wife, the two of them, around the world in a two-person sloop. (laughs) I'm not kidding. This is a funny group. They're really good sailors, the whole family. (both laugh)

And the person, David Forbes – I'll never forget this. I was showing off. I took a

sailboat, with Ralph Rensler, actually, and a couple of other people. I was showing them, and we actually got caught in a current, and David caught us in a motorboat and was really pissed off that I – I had no business sailing where I was sailing, and not knowing I was sailing _____. I didn't know enough – no, no, no. I mean – but everyone that's an advanced sailor and doing what I should have been had I – in other words, I was doing something I was not vaguely prepared for. I should have known not to do what I did, which was go into a dangerous current. Because they know the currents.

And it's really interesting what a kiss ass Ralph Waldo Emerson was to the family. In the mansion house, the main house on the island, is kept the log of people writing their feelings about it. So comes the time of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and he wrote in the log a lot of prose about the family and how happy he was to be part of it, and this and that. So he married one of the Forbes women. So then his family became part of it. All of their descendents are part of the same family.

Anyway, so I was wooing Kate, who I met there. And I don't even know how she ever found out about Pete Seeger because she has no politics whatsoever. None. I mean, she never met a Jew before in her life until me, the first Jew she ever met. What she didn't know – I mean, she was oblivious to, was that her father was a socialist, because in the family home in Ojai, which I understand now has been sold, were his books and his own writings, and I read them. He was part of the group around Bertram Russell. He was friends with Russell.

And Paula, my former mother-in-law, Kate's mother, what a ditz-head. I mean, she was the first woman to get her medical degree at Oxford in England, Paula Mason. Yeah, she was the first woman ever to get a medical degree through Oxford. And then she married

this rich guy and she – I don't think she – I don't know. I guess she had a terrible childhood. In the First World War, almost all her brothers died, were killed in the war, or with illness in London. But then in Oxford, she met Walter Hughes, and they got married. Kate was actually born in Kenya. They were in Africa, in Nairobi, when she was born. And then they moved to Ojai.

VC: Why Ojai?

EP: I don't know. Oh, yeah, I do know. What is the religion that _____ is part of? You know who he is.

VC: Yeah.

EP: Well, they brought _____ here. So they were part of that. And Kate was part of – she was talking about it, but I mean, she was fascinating, she was so beautiful I couldn't – it was just this whole thing. It was just very mysterious. It was slightly incoherent. In any event, it didn't matter. She was an artist, a great, great, great artist. Great artist. So I was courting her. We met at this place where these Flamenco dancers were. I think I told you about it.

VC: Hmm.

EP: I didn't.

VC: No.

EP: This great dancer, Carmen Amaya, had brought a troupe over from Spain to play in Palm Springs. When they got there, the place went bust before they opened. So there she was, stuck, having brought her whole troupe of people to this country. So she had to go back to Spain to get money to bring them all back. So while they were waiting, they all moved to L.A. I don't know exactly how that – whatever. They were hanging out at this same

place, so we met the lead male dancer, Genaro Gomez, and became friends with him. Bernabe De Moron, the guitarist of the troupe at that time, a gypsy with one eye, mysteriously. A glass eye. Oh, my God, what an omen, huh?

So anyway, we were playing, and he was just amazing. And I who was studying with _____, Gerry knew of him, of Bernabe, he told me to watch out for those gypsies. Being half gypsy himself, he knew whereof he spoke. And I just wanted my folk friends to hear a great guitarist, so Genaro Gomez and Pepita Funez, the female dancer that would be his partner, and then Carmen would come in and dance around. She was already getting old by that time, but she was still *the* dancer. Anyway, they were willing to do it just for, you know, whatever.

But Bernabe said he couldn't do it for less than a hundred dollars. Well, that's a lot of money. That meant I couldn't go to a home and just do a hootenanny type thing. So I went to the Yellow Pages and just started making phone calls. There were only like ten halls listed. And when I got to the L.A. Jazz Concert Hall on Crenshaw and Olympic – I think it's a movie theater now, just south of Olympic – I called and this guy answered the phone, and I said I wanted to talk about renting the place. He said, "What do you want?" So when I told him what it was, it turns out he was a Flamenco student himself. Later on, it turns out he's a wonderful guy that actually ran for office on the Peace and Freedom Party. His name was Jack Hampton. So I said, "How much does it cost?" He said, "Well, why don't you come down here and look at it."

So I went down there, and it was this gorgeous theater, simply superb seven hundred, eight hundred seat theater, just perfect. So I said, "How much?" He said, "Well, how much do you think it's worth?" I said, "I don't know. Fifty dollars?" (laughs) I'm not

kidding. He smiled and he says, "Okay. We'll do it for fifty dollars." (both laugh) I didn't know. I had no idea what I was talking about. So for fifty dollars, I got this whole thing. I did it for nothing for myself, which is my wont my whole life. But I was able to – we sold it out. I knew it was sold out two weeks before.

But in the meantime, Kate drew the figures of Genaro and Pepita for the flyer. So it was a communal thing, and that was part of the fun of it. So there was an excuse for us to go back there constantly and be together and all that. I mean, she was living in Upland at the time, so she would drive in. It didn't occur to me, I didn't understand how she had a Mercedes. I really didn't. It's a racing Mercedes with this thing that opens up like this.

VC: Really. The gull-wing.

E: She had been living with somebody, even though she was eighteen, and had just had a little kid. So then that's how I became Marnie's father, really. It's not my own kid. Joey is my own child. But I raised Marnie, I didn't raise Joey. That's a big sad difference.

But anyway, so we did that, and then we planned another one. Part of it was just using all of my connections with the UCLA Folk Song Club. There was another folk song club and people who were going to the Unicorn and Sally Terry's place that had opened on Fairfax Avenue, and just people that I could talk to in the Zionist or liberal Jewish community that I knew, just whatever it was. And I pulled it all together. I knew it was sold out a week before, so I made this other second one. And somebody said that this guy named Logan English was coming from Kentucky and he was going to be in town. So I made a concert with him and Marsha Berman, who was a folk singer that actually I've known all my life. I went to grammar school with her.

VC: So she's from L.A.?

EP: Yeah.

VC: So that was the second concert you guys did?

EP: Yeah, with Marsha and Logan English in a large home that was kind of a gathering place.

It was kind the earliest of you might say the hippie places, something like that, in Santa Monica, right off of Pico and 6th. You go to this house on 6th Street and right now there's a huge motel on the southwest corner, and if you just go south, you'll run into Pico Place about thirty feet south of Pico Boulevard, and you turn in there and right on the left was a big property. Actually, Marcie George – not McCabe. Something. Anyway, Marcie's family were Spanish and they owned the entire tract there, so she had – I mean, they didn't have any money but they had this kind of ranch house with a lot of property. So all you did was open the glass doors to this huge patio. You could have a lot of people. So that's where we did that.

And then I planned another one. That one was like in January or February of '58. But by that time, I had already – on the first concert, the one thing I did, I knew I was going – I was making my money teaching – after I came back from Edwards, I started making my money by teaching guitar, primarily to children. But after the first concert, which I think must have been in October of '57 or something like that, I got a student named Sid Greenberg, and by coincidence, by happenstance, where he lived was in Palms, which is this side of Venice, or the area next to it. Sort of south of Pico, Roxbury. Not Beverly Hills but that area. Really nice homes. A lot of wealthier Jewish people.

Anyway, so he signed up for guitar lessons and we became friends almost instantly. He was a chess player, I was a chess player, a very good chess player, actually. I won the UCLA Rapid Transit tournament, and by doing that – rapid transit means ten seconds per move. And I learned how to play from a student of one America's junior chess champions, Eugene Levin, who was one of my older brother's friends, Eugene. And Lenny Zeitland was his A student, and I learned from Lenny. I had learned earlier from him. And I wound up defeating Eugene, who was so mad. I thought I was going to die. I thought he was going to kill me for sure. He left his queen exposed, and I took it. Then he was so aggressive that he almost beat me anyway, without the queen. It was amazing.

But anyway, I beat him and – probably nobody will believe this, but two other national champions, Robert – I can't remember their names now. It'll come to me. But anyway, they were both at UCLA. I have to say I could probably never duplicate that in my lifetime because I wasn't that advanced a player. I liked the game. I loved it, actually. And I had just – that semester I had done nothing but sit in the chess room and play chess. Nothing. So I was really sharp, I was really at the top of my game. But Eugene was an international master, and so were both of the other two. They were all advanced players, and with any kind of serious game. I mean, they knew world chess. They were world level chess players. And I came from nowhere. But I won it. One of my greatest achievements. (both laugh) It was really funny. Eugene was so fuckin' mad.

One time we were riding with Eugene in the car, Lenny, and a couple of others. They always took me along because I provided them amusement or something. I was younger. I think we were camping in Yosemite, where I almost fell off a mountain, down a sheer

cliff, but that's another – I'm getting nervous just thinking about it. I was so close to dying. So close. Oh, my God, it was just stupid.

VC: Were you guys just fooling around and hiking?

EP: Well, I again was doing something without thinking through what I was doing, and I got myself in a position where I was over a sheer precipice. I had my feet on this side, and I was on this side. I was inching, going like that. And I had to make it across about thirty feet like that. And if I hadn't really focused, and if I'd gotten frightened, or whatever, I would have fallen to my death. I mean, it was like a thousand feet down or something, some huge amount. But I should never – at any rate, I was reckless at that time, at that point.

So anyway, we were driving up to this, and Eugene said, "How could you coordinate like ten signals going both ways so that you could go twenty-eight miles an hour in any direction and go –" So, mentally, we just sat there and we figured out – (laughs) It became a small town _____ traffic pattern on this thing. It's really funny. When you're challenged like that, you really – I think I'm more of a competitor, actually, than anything else. And when I'm with all these geniuses, I have to compete with them. So I did. I mean, not that I – Eugene undoubtedly led the thing, but we all did it. We'd come to solution and then somebody would find a flaw in it. We were just driving in the car. (laughs)

So that was Eugene. He got his Ph.D. at some ridiculous age, twenty-three, twenty-two, something like that. And then he became Simon Ramo's assistant.

VC: Who's that?

EP: Did you ever hear of Ramo-Wooldridge?

VC: No.

EP: Did you ever hear of TRW?

VC: Yeah.

EP: Yes. Thompson-Ramo-Wooldridge. So he was Simon Ramo's assistant. So I met Lenny Zeitland after I started the Ash Grove on the pier. His daughter came to me, so I called him and we got together. We talked about things and all that. He was sort of a lost soul at that point. He had worked – I mean, he wasn't like Mark, but he had worked on all these upper level guidance systems for bombs and all this. It was Lenny, my really dear friend. And I asked him about Eugene, and Eugene's an alcoholic. He had gone to a party with Eugene and Eugene just was drunk. And they had done similar work. It's pathetic.

The thing about it was that Gene's parents were communists. That's the thing. A lot of people, their children – I think that kids of – the communists, I guess, were so dogmatic as their brilliant children challenged them, or whatever, or they demanded of their children that they could do what they want, and the kids didn't want to do it. You know, we're going our own path.

So I think that something happened, but just people slightly older than me really never got into the sixties. They just – I mean, some of *my* friends, anyway, went into – if they were physicists, like Eugene was, and Lenny, or whatever, Mark being an historian. They just got caught up in being incredibly bright and could advance, whatever. I mean, Gene was such an egomaniac. I mean, he was good. He was a good football player and a good tennis player. I mean – no, I'm serious. It's not like we're a bunch of nerds. I'm serious. Gene was tough, really a tough guy, and he was really mad

at me when I beat him, really mad. He almost – I mean, I could just tell he was ready to split, like Rumpelstiltskin or something. Anyway, but all that's a long time ago, and he's probably dead by now, from drinking. Cirrhosis.

VC: There were a lot of people who were kind of sucked up into the Cold War machine, and it was pretty vast. If you were smart, you know.

EP: Yep. I got an offer to go to Monterey Language School, for Russian. I was studying Russian for awhile.

VC: How come you didn't?

EP: I already was against the American policy, against McCarthy, against the Cold War, against the American establishment, and so on. I wanted nothing to do with it. I wouldn't dream of it.

VC: Right. What was that third gig?

EP: Oh, then the third gig was not quite a repeat of the first gig. We had two guitarists, Bernabe De Moron and Manolo Vargas. That one was back at the L.A. Jazz Concert Hall, and it turned out to be the rainiest night of the year. It was like a deluge, and we still sold not. Not a seat in the house. People made it somehow.

VC: Wow! It sold out because everyone wanted to see Flamenco?

EP: No. Well, part of it was – it's like asking how come so many kids are – something magic happened at that time, like has happened with all the young people now with Obama. People just wanted – they were so repressed by 1958. "Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley" by the Kingston Trio a year earlier just let loose. Everyone wanted to play the guitar, wanted to play the banjo, wanted to make music. And the idea of singing or going out or doing something. And for whatever reason – well, because I was part of that

– we'd been playing guitar in Habonim, and whatever. Like I said, I was playing guitar before I did the Pete Seeger thing, and had been part of the UCLA Folk Song Club.

So there was always that element, but it was like magnified a hundred-fold by the time I started the Ash Grove. People were just waiting for something. Artists and singers and regular people and political people. And people who were connected with the Communist Party actually helped me start the place, and I didn't even realize it. One I knew. That was Guy Carawan's wife, Noel Oliver. Her father, Bill Oliver, was a writer for the *Herald Examiner*, who was blacklisted. I didn't know his organizational affiliation, but I sort of guessed it. But he had been blacklisted, so he was writing for *The Guardian* newspaper, so the big pre-Ash Grove article on this new place that's opening was written by him.

Somehow, I wound up with a – I don't know, through Guy – I don't know through whom, but somebody got me to hire an out of work drunk Swiss person who could do everything, named Freddie _____, who was a socialist. I mean, he was a socialist but a real working-class guy. He was married to a Mexican woman. And when he wasn't drunk, we billed the Ash Grove, him and me. I was his main assistant. I mean, when I could keep him straight. And also, the electrician, Herman Rosenfield, who had just moved into Los Angeles from New York. So he did it. And they worked for very little, like twenty-five a day, or something like that.

VC: Wow! Was he another CP guy?

EP: He was, yeah, definitely. Oh, yeah. He was a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He died right before I opened the Ash Grove on the pier. I really was hoping – he was living in Santa Monica then, and he came by and we talked. It was really great seeing

him.

And then, when I was burnt down the first time, in '69, his son Paul had just gotten his license, so I was his first job. He worked very cheaply and did all the electrical installation on the second Ash Grove. And then, on the Ash Grove on the pier, Paul was the mayor of Santa Monica, so he made a little speech. Well, the mayor of Santa Monica is a member of the city council that's elected mayor for year. I mean, he was the mayor. He was elected two or three times. I think he lost his seat most recently. Yeah, he did, definitely, a couple of years ago.

VC: So after those three shows –

EP: By the third time, I think it was – it was either shortly before the third time or shortly after the third time. I was telling you about Sid Greenberg. I would wind up my week at his house, with his wife, Betty, and his two kids, whose names I forget. We'd have dinner – or first, I'd give him a lesson, then we'd have dinner, then we'd play a game of chess. He was a chess player.

VC: How old were you at that point?

EP: Twenty-one. So, I was telling him about – I came out and looked at these nightclubs, and we didn't like them because we don't like nightclubs. And we'd really like to start – we think we should start our own place. He said, "How much do you think that would cost?" I said, "I don't know." He says, "Why don't you find out? I might be able to do something." So I said, "Well, sure. That'd be terrific." So I asked around and found out that Herbie Cohen – you're not related to him, are you?

VC: Nope.

EP: Just kidding. It's a good line, though. (both laugh) You're not going to pull out a gun and shoot me, are you? So, Herbie had already fired this guy, Lenny Potash[?], who will probably be there tomorrow. Lenny became a major officer in one of the labor unions. He's retired now. But he still plays and sings _____. So I met with Lenny, whom I had never met before, and he drew up basically a cost expense sheet. It came to five thousand dollars. So I went back to Sid, and he said, "Okay, I can finance that." He said, "But make sure that that's right." I said, "Yeah, it's just an approximation." He says, "If it costs more, you're going to have to raise it." It turns out it would cost ten thousand, actually, to start the Ash Grove at that time.

So I got the rest through – by that time, really, there was a whole network of people trying that I could call and they would suggest, well, why don't you ask this one and that one. So my own family, my mother a little bit, a little bit, not much, and a couple of other people. I met these three people – he was a psychologist, and the two women, I think, lived together. I'm pretty sure. I can't remember what – they had some small investment thing so they invested two thousand dollars. My mother invested five hundred. And there were others. So it cost ten thousand.

I found the Ash Grove, I found the building. It was a furniture factory and showroom, and it just seemed like it was perfect. The showroom was in front and the factory part was where the concert room would be. And in the middle there was already a bathroom. We put in a second one. And the other side was an office, and we made that into the kitchen, because the waterline would be on a straight line. So it was the right thing to do. We sort of just guesstimated it. I can't even remember who did the drawings on it.

So I was helping construction, with Freddie, I was helping electrician with Gabby, so I was a general helper. And we just worked and worked and worked. Then I was also starting to book and get people to work there, and this and that. It was all fine, because there were a lot of people that wanted to work there, and I had this group of friends, aside from Kate. Phil Melnick, who has a lot of photographs of the Ash Grove, the early stuff. Ed Michel, he's a, I guess, well-known jazz producer, recording producer now, and he's retired also. I mean, retired because there's no money to be made. He lives in Hawaii now. And a couple of other people.

So, you know, we just did a little brainstorming. Phil was very good at accounting, and all that, very precise. He was an art major. He was an art historian, actually. And photographer. So we put it together and we opened.

VC: How long did that take?

EP: Well, we opened on July 11, so let's see, it took two months of work.

VC: And that was in 1958?

EP: Yeah. And I was still teaching. I can't remember when I quit teaching. Probably right before we opened. Not right before, probably two weeks before. The last two weeks was – I almost didn't sleep.

VC: Really.

EP: Yeah, really. And the funny thing is – because there would be all these things to be done, because I was also doing all the buying, so I would go out with a long list of things to buy for the electricity and for Freddie and for anything else. I'd come there, and then I'd be helping them during the day. And there was all these things to be done so that the next day would be productive, so I just continued working. I would get really sleepy

about three, four in the afternoon, and then at seven o'clock, seven-thirty, I would wake up and I could just go all night, painting – and then a lot of people came in. It turns out, one of the brothers of this girl that I was teaching guitar to, Lenny Stein, had become a painter. I remember him coming in. Well, actually, this was when he returned, when we were trying to reopen, when everything was burned down. And there were all these people painting, and he says, "Yeah, tell them to go away." He takes out this big roller and with _____ (laughs) _____ a professional painter _____. He just spread like that. Anyway, so he helped. It was years earlier, ten years earlier. He was becoming a painter, so he knew how to paint.

Oh, I'm sorry, and then the reason Sid Greenberg – his father was Ed Greenberg, who started Standard Brands Paint Company. So at that time he was the vice president of Standard Brands Paint Company, which I didn't know until he told me. So we got all the paint for free. And he made us special colors that Bert Koch – the guy who painted the original Ash Grove thing, he wanted certain colors so he met with Sid and gave him _____ have them mixed, and everything like that.

VC: So it wasn't hard to open, in the sense that –

EP: It was very hard.

VC: I guess what I'm saying is there were a lot of people who helped and wanted it to go up.

EP: Yes, definitely.

VC: I mean, I don't know how it got up, but it sounds like a tremendous amount of work.

EP: It was. And we lucked out in a lot of things. The acoustics were just terrific,

which is why the tapes sound so good, one of the reasons, and the sound of the room was just wonderful.

VC: And that was just luck?

EP: Uh-huh. People were dying of the heat during the summer. I bought two circular fans from – Sears used to have – well, their big main thing is on Olympic and Soto. I don't know if it's still there. But that's where you can get the mail order delivered. So I got these to big fans for probably like a hundred dollars each or something. So that's all we ever had were these two huge suckers. They really did the job. It was really hot that first summer. And when there was a sound problem with the neighbors, the people from Cal Tech came and did all the sound.

VC: And they were hanging out already.

EP: Yeah, they were taking band and playing banjo and coming in, and there were customers. Of course, it was – one particular Friday, it happened to be a sound expert that brought in his colleagues. So it was always like that.

VC: And were you there every day?

EP: Yeah.

VC: For every show?

EP: Yeah.

VC: Just taking the door, everything?

EP: Yeah. Well, Kate was first cashier, and then she wanted to resume her life as a dancer, which was proper.

VC: And it was profitable from the minute it opened?

EP: No. No, it wasn't. Because after it opened, right after it opened, the second week

was – the first week was fantastic. The second week was like this. Then the third week – because I didn't really know how to book.

VC: Right, because you'd only really booked what, four shows before then?

EP: Well, yeah, but that was – I had time to prepare. I ran across world-class artists, and I had world-class artists that first weekend with _____, Guy, and Brownie McGee.

People hadn't seen the blues. They hadn't seen Flamenco. I'd already popularized Flamenco with – I had a mailing list with – and so on. We did a lot of mailing to the people who signed up at the Flamenco concerts. So I did all of that, getting mailing addresses and phone numbers, and whatnot.

No, just – it was difficult. And then slowly – it was obvious that we were hindered without a beer and wine license, at least, and we were hindered not having capital. So after we got busted for not having an entertainment license, during that period of let's say December, January, February – it took us three months to do that – we realized that we had to be refinanced. At that point my girlfriend 'fessed up to having – well, we were already together. So anyway, basically, she bought out everybody and we started with another ten thousand dollars. It was a big deal for her because she never spent any money, rarely spent any money. So that's what happened. That's how I became the sole owner of the Ash Grove. And we bought out Sid Greenberg and my mother and all the other people.

But then, from then on, I managed to make do. I probably had a Pete Seeger concert right then. I very quickly became Joan Baez' concert producer. I produced The Weavers. I was the fair-haired boy for all of these older people that became the managers. They were all connected with either the CP or the – whatever. Al

Grossman, Manny Greenhill, Harold Leventhal, Paul Endicott. I forget the other Chicago guy's name, a Socialist Workers Party guy. Probably because of the article in *The Guardian*, and then meeting them all in Newport in '59, that was – well, you know, they looked at me as somebody that they liked, for some reason. Whatever reason. So they'd send me artists and –

VC: Really. So they would direct people to you out here on the West Coast.

EP: Yeah. Well, they'd call me and say would I like The Terriers, so I said sure.

Harold Leventhal. I asked him a couple of years later why The Terriers weren't – because then the issue – as I was becoming more confident and more aware of everything, I suggested that they should maybe take along some traditional musician. I can't remember what I said, but apparently I insulted – because they didn't want to do it. Harold Leventhal got very offended by me.

VC: Because you were presuming to know his business?

EP: I can't remember. Because he came to the Ash Grove and he said, "No one has ever spoken to me like that before." I probably opened up my big socialist mouth. I really can't remember what I said, but we got into an argument. I was supposed to be a nice little boy and not say anything. But I was already into it because somebody had talked to me about copyright. I met Willie Dixon, who was already – I think he was the person that broke the copyright thing, that was the first person to get copyright property rights on his own songs, which had been taken by the Chess brothers.

VC: Right. I mean, he wrote practically all of them, right?

EP: Yeah. And Willie played in '59. Barbara Dane knew that Memphis Slim was coming from France to visit, and somehow she knew him. She'd met him in France or

something. I don't know what, but she knew Memphis, so she – and then he asked Willie, from Chicago, to come and play, so they played the Ash Grove for two weeks.

VC: Were you just _____ who was playing.

EP: And Barbara, yeah. I mean, so we had two acts, and an acoustic base and this great piano that Memphis Slim played. Willie probably talked with me then. I'm pretty sure that's what happened. So it started getting – I agreed with him completely. I mean, obviously. It's ridiculous that Jews, especially Jews, would do that to him. I mean, I still had fantasies about – I thought Jews were progressive. I didn't know. I still hadn't really exposed or understood the downside of Israel yet. I mean, I sort of did, but not really. And I really didn't know how – I mean, well anyway, I just didn't know the situation. I hadn't thought about copyright or any of those issues.

VC: I mean, it makes sense once you hear it, right?

EP: Yeah. So anyway, so that sort of divided me. Then I went very traditional years later, which I can see now is going to be the subject of the next time. Not now.

Probably, by the way, we'll be able to meet next week. I don't think I'm going to go to Ojai. There's just too much to do here. And I have a number of appointments. And if I spend a whole day up there – also, they no longer live in a house, so that makes a difference because they're living in a motel, so that won't be with just Arthur and Kate and Lenny, Arthur's wife, and people, you know, just to talk and stuff. But rather there'll be a whole bunch of people around there, and there's a dinner for _____'s eightieth party and all that. It's too much. So anyway, I don't think I'm going to drive up there.

VC: Do you want to stop here?

EP: Yeah.

[end]

Ed Pearl

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